

General Motors Corporation

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ROBERT C. STEMPEL
PRESIDENT

January 31, 1989

The Honorable Sharpe James
Mayor of Newark
Newark, New Jersey 07102

Dear Mayor James:

Thank you for your letter on the problem of auto theft. I want to assure you that we at General Motors share your concern, and we support stricter enforcement of existing laws and stiffer penalties for car thieves. Stealing a car for a "joy ride" is not just an adolescent prank; it's a crime and should be treated as such.

While teenagers stealing cars for "joy rides" is a serious problem, it is important to realize that auto theft often involves much more than teenage delinquency. Many auto thieves are adults, participating in an illegal business. As long as there is a demand for stolen autos or parts from stolen cars, criminals are apparently willing to take the risk of trying to defeat any anti-theft device a manufacturer may develop, including alarms. There have been reports of thieves using tow trucks to steal a car whose anti-theft system they could not disable. They will even destroy a car to get what they want.

At GM, we continue to make product changes aimed at making our vehicles more difficult to steal. We are using new materials for the steering column shroud and rearranging the controls inside the column on several models, including the Cadillac Eldorado, Seville and Allante, the Buick Riviera, Reatta and Regal, Chevrolet Corsica and Beretta, Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme, and the Pontiac Grand Prix.

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We have also developed the PASS (Personalized Auto Security System) Key System that is now used on several of our cars. The car key has a resistor pellet. Unless the resistance in the key matches the one in the vehicle, the starter and fuel-system controls are electronically disabled, preventing the engine from being started. The use of this system on the Chevrolet Corvette and Pontiac Trans Am GTA in recent models years has reduced the theft rate on those models significantly, and this feature is now standard on Cadillac Eldorados and Seviles, Chevrolet Camaros, and Pontiac Firebirds and Trans Ams. If customer acceptance continues to be favorable, we plan to introduce this feature on other models, especially where reported theft rates are high.

The value of any theft-deterrent system has to be balanced against other concerns such as safety, customer convenience, serviceability and cost. In some cases, we have added cost to our vehicles that does not seem to benefit our customers. Since 1987, GM has complied with federal law requiring vehicle identification numbers on up to 14 major parts of designated vehicles, so called "high-theft" models. So far, we have seen no evidence that marked parts are being used to catch or prosecute car thieves or those who receive stolen parts.

We share your concern. We are working to make GM vehicles more theft resistant, and we will support efforts for stricter law enforcement. No vehicle system is going to be totally effective. We also need to step up our efforts to put those who receive and sell stolen cars and car parts out of business. We can work to reduce both the supply of and demand for stolen vehicles.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. C. Stempel", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert C. Stempel